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Meeting the Needs of Older Rural Girls

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MEETING THE NEEDS OF OLDER RURAL GIRLS*

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Organization, 4-H Club Work

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Need for Study

For several years the rural girls of the later teens and early twenties have been challenging the attention of all thinking extension agents, especially those engaged in 4-H club work. That effective methods will ultimately be found whereby a large number of these girls may be reached is indicated in the results of the work for 1931. The percentage of increase in the enrollment of all club members for 1931 as compared with that for 1930 was 8.3; the percentage for girls 16 years of age being 14.6 and increasing for each age group up to 20 years, where the increase in percentage of enrollment was 32.6 (fig. 1). Although this very rapid growth in one year's time is good proof that effective methods are being evolved, yet the comparison of enrollments according to age groups (fig. 2) clearly defines the large amount of work still to be done.

Work Under Way

With the gratifying expansion of work with girls from 16 to 20 years of age in 1931, as already indicated, the summary of the answers to a questionnaire regarding the work with girls of this age group should be of special interest to extension workers. Replies were received from a large majority of the States. In all but four of these States a definite program is now being worked out for girls of this age group. The fact that the programs vary considerably is indicative of the experimentation under way, which should soon evolve some sound principles of procedure.

*A paper presented at the meeting of the American Home Economics Association, Atlanta, Ga., June 23, 1932.

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Figure I.

4-H club enrollment 1931; percentage of increase over 1930, between ages 16 and 20, inclusive.

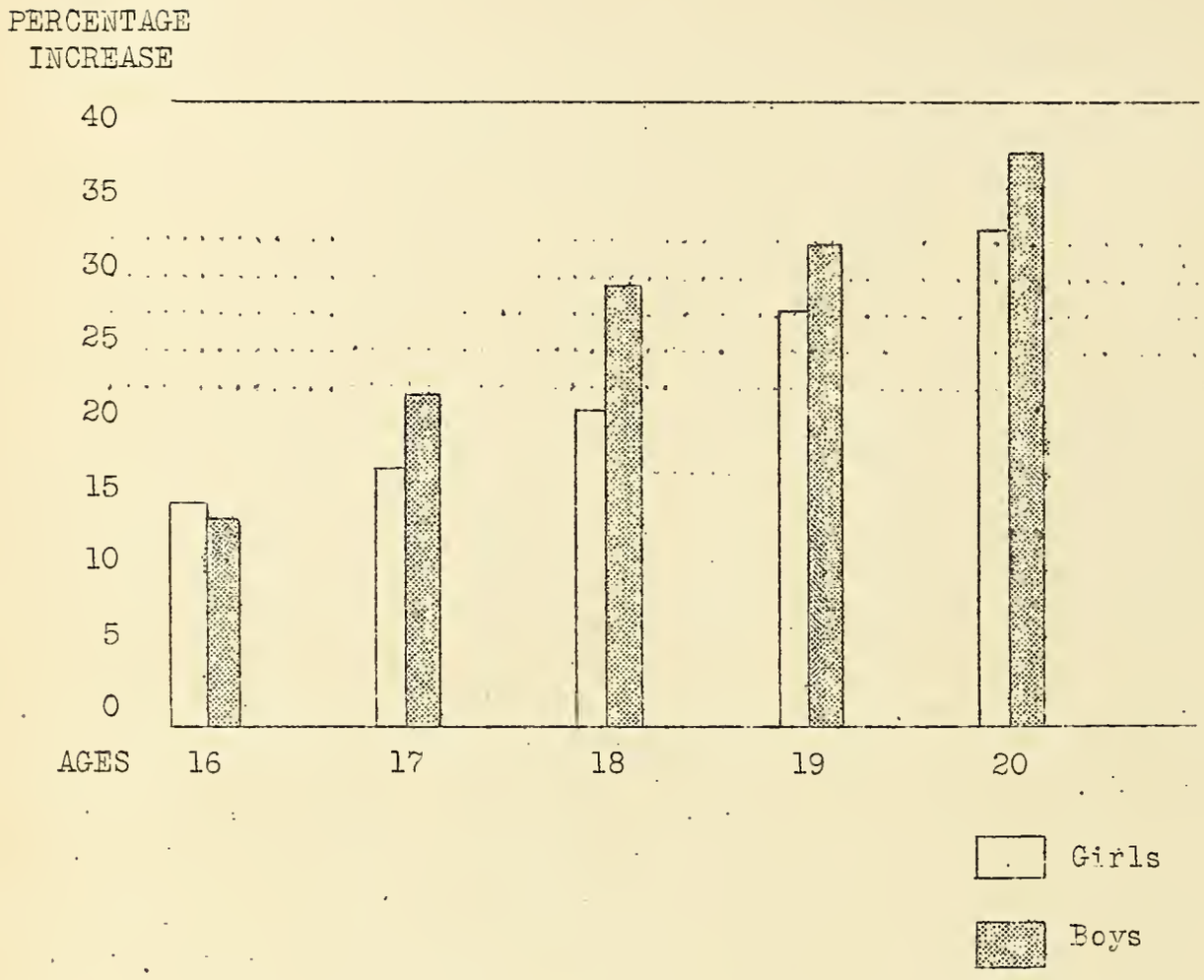
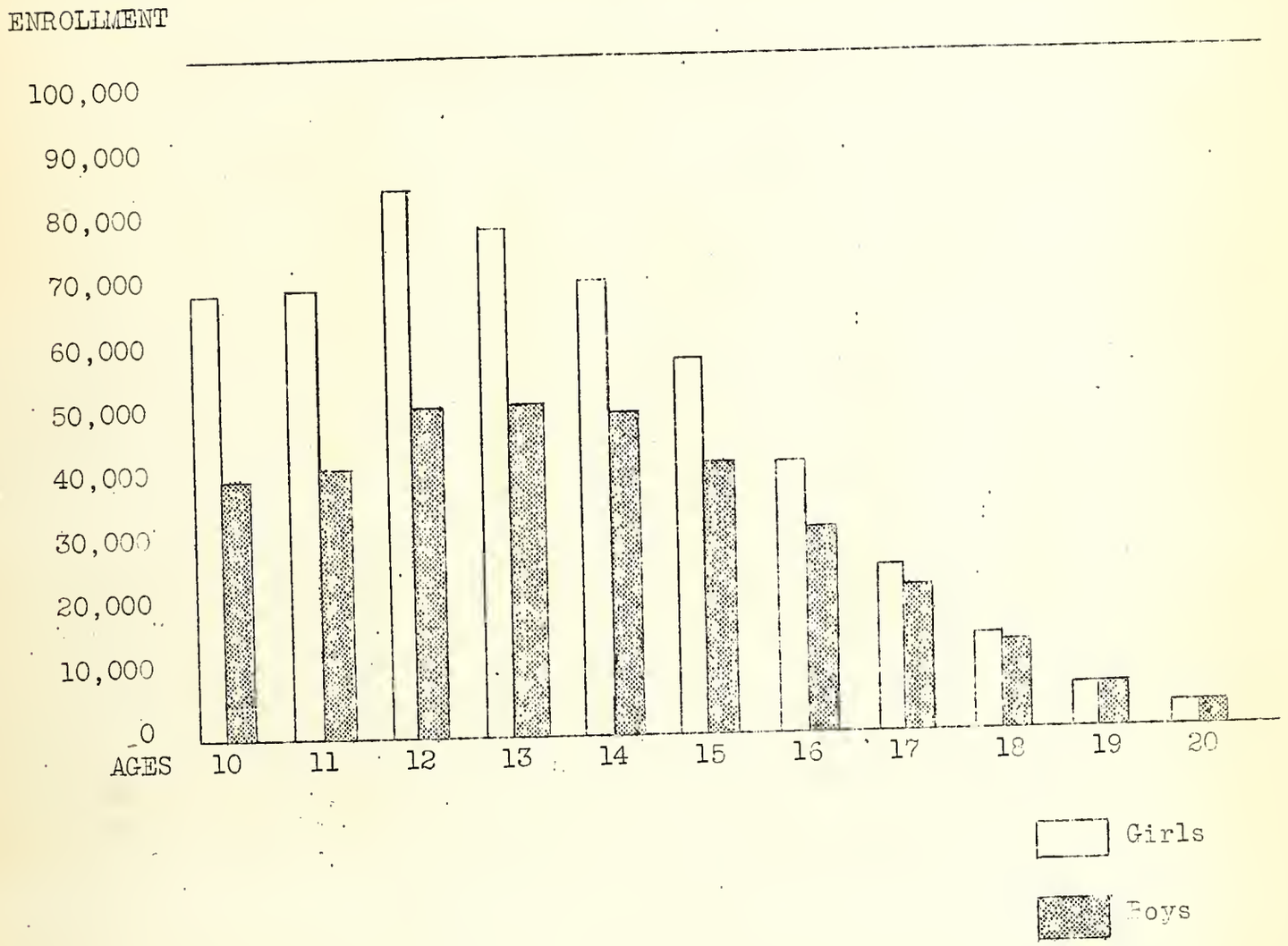


Figure II.

4-H club enrollment by age, 1931.



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All such programs seem to be based upon a sound understanding of the inherent traits of girls of this age group. These traits have been capitalized or redirected in keeping with the objectives to be reached, which, in turn, usually have been determined through joint conferences of these girls, their local leaders or agents acting as advisers. Answers to the questionnaire show that in the formulation of programs for girls from 16 to 20 years of age the older girl is being increasingly recognized as having the personality of an adult and of belonging to a group with different attitudes from those of younger members. Replies from states show that different appeals are being made, different terminology is being used and different or more advanced work assigned.

Names for clubs of these girls differ considerably. Some may say a name is of no significance, yet in industry huge sums of money are often paid to those who happen to select the most appropriate name for a new concern or a new product, on the theory that a name may imply an appeal that will in turn result in favorable action. Ruth Osborne of Montana, in proposing the name 4-H Rural League, states, "It (the name) should retain the 4-H; it should be unusual; it should be simple and pleasing to the ear; it should be short; and it should be easily remembered and spoken." On these bases, the names already in use for clubs of older girls are of interest. The answers to the questionnaire include in many instances "service clubs" which are consistent with the older girls' growing desires to serve. In such clubs leaders have sought to provide these girls with as many opportunities as possible to serve in their homes and in their communities as well as within their own clubs; thereby helping them to feel that they have a place in the community, and to develop in them an interest in home and civic affairs which is likely to carry over into permanent community interests.

In a number of States these older girls are organized into "senior clubs," consistent with their desire to act as adults. To qualify for membership in these clubs a girl must usually be at least 15 years of age and have been in club work from two to four years. In keeping with this same appeal, in Georgia there have been organized "county 4-H club alumni associations." These associations, organized for the girls who have completed their work, are for the purpose of promoting 4-H club work, of maintaining the interest of the older girls in the extension program, and of helping these girls "to find themselves." In Alabama and some other States, a special effort is being made also to acquaint such girls with the general resources and traditions of their communities and counties so that, thereby, they may duly appreciate their own home environment.

Answers to the questionnaire indicate that a large number of 4-H programs are offering this wide-awake club girl, consistent with her desire to have a home, opportunities to become more of a partner with her mother in assuming managerial responsibility for some phase of the routine home-making tasks. In several states such clubs are known as Junior Home makers. In other States the names Home Builders and Home Science are applied. Several State leaders, in answering the questionnaire, referred to the opportunity given to the rural girl to gain managerial training in all phases of home making by taking over household work when mother goes to town or makes a visit to her relatives, or, perhaps, attends a farm woman's camp or short course. As a result of such opportunity, State leaders write that the farm girl is developing more interest in home affairs and more appreciation of the human values involved.

Recognizing that as a girl matures her interests naturally widen, club programs, accordingly, in most States have been expanded and kept flexible, in keeping

with these girls' own-felt desires and needs. In Virginia, these girls through their home-management work are studying the qualifications for home makers and how to best develop to meet such qualifications. They are learning how to assume home responsibilities. They are keeping personal or household accounts and are carrying out a definite plan for saving as well as for adding to the income. They are striving to attain a high degree of personal fitness and to maintain conditions for good health in the family. They are making plans for furnishing a house, using a budget allowance, and are seeking to carry out at least one plan for increasing the enjoyment of the summer or winter leisure of the family. Throughout the year, each of these girl checks and tries to improve the distribution of daily tasks in her home and, in addition, seeks to improve herself through such activities as reading and study of nature, pictures and music. State leaders write also that these expanded club programs, especially in clothing, food, and home furnishings or home-management work, have maintained the interests of these girls and have helped to meet, in turn, their own social and economic problems. Through cumulative experiences, gained from such procedure, State leaders believe that the predominant mistake in dealing with groups of these girls has, in the past, been often one of underestimating rather than of overestimating their interests and abilities.

Because of the instinctive desire of older girls to participate in social affairs where are present boys of their own age, more group meetings for both girls and boys are being organized, according to the answers to the questionnaire. In some States both girls and boys belong to the same club. In other States, in the girls' clubs special events are planned to which boys are invited. Many club leaders feel that if such events are handled properly, much good may result by maintaining the interest of girls in worth-while home-making and community activities and by providing an opportunity for them to meet fine, manly young men. However, replies indicated that in this day of youthful freedom, wise, understanding, adult guidance is necessary so that such joint club activities may be kept on a wholesome, constructive basis.

In some States in which both young men and young women are members of the same clubs, the name Senior or County Club Council is usually applied. However, in Kentucky, after considerable thought, the name Utopia was selected with a ritual based on Sir Thomas More's Utopia.

In Pennsylvania, as in several other States, an effort is being made to get the older girls to study their own needs and how these needs can be met, and to see the value of interesting themselves in the younger group as well as in helping others. In some instances where the work is under way, these older girls have offered to keep the small children of farm women one afternoon a month so that the women may go to town. One of these Pennsylvania girls stated that if Junior League members in the big cities can do community service, she did not see any reason why the older girls in the farm communities could not be of service also.

Most of the State replies indicated that opportunities were being increasingly provided for maintaining the interests of older girls, both in school and out of school, through the present 4-H club organization, in some States through the leadership project, in others, through the county 4-H club council, and in still others, through the All Stars and other honorary organizations. In almost every State effort is being made also to give definite responsibility and distinction to members of this group for helping with such club activities as camps and achievement days.

Results

To the question, What have been the results of work with this group? many State leaders replied that work with this older group of girls had developed in them greatly increased interest in home and community affairs as well as in the progress of their club work. Several State leaders reported that nearly twice the number of club members 16 years of age and over were enrolled in 1931 as in 1930. According to Figure 1, a similar increase must have been achieved in several other States. Many of the State leaders replied that, among the important results of work with this group, was the development of leadership ability and an earnest desire to serve as local leaders, as well as a sense of responsibility for sharing in home and community undertakings. Minnesota reported that, "Several of the girls are doing the family baking or the family mending and sewing. Some are responsible for planning, preparing, and serving the family meals for a certain length of time, while others are doing most of the family canning or taking care of the garden." In Kentucky in one county, these older members took over the enrollment campaign for all 4-H club members, which resulted in a large increase in membership. A State club leader in Kentucky wrote, "We find these young people very eager to do something worth while." In Virginia, these older girls are sponsoring the junior 4-H club work, and when there is opportunity they act as local leaders for the junior club groups.

As a result of the work in several States to standardize certain food products for the market, many of these older girls are now making good profits each week. In Augusta County, Va., at least 10 partnerships have been formed between mother and daughter from which aash returns are being realized. This result holds true in other States as do the making of cakes, cookies, and other baked products, and the raising of garden produce and poultry together with canning the surplus. In Georgia, these older girls have become more interested in the problems on the farm and in the home and as a result of this interest the county 4-H club alumni associations, already mentioned, have been organized. A Mississippi State leader reports, "Special attention to the older club members has made for permanency of 4-H club work, helped to maintain their interest in worth-while work, and popularized the whole 4-H club movement very materially." To the question on results, a State club leader of Utah replied, "Our county agents and State workers are now more converted to the possibilities of 4-H club work; to its being educational as well as recreational; to its part in promoting the extension program, and its value in family relationships; to its development of club members as demonstrators and leaders; and to its influence on the younger group of club members." One of the State leaders of Nevada in replying to this question stated, "This leadership responsibility and individualized project work with the older girl is, we believe, producing substantial results. We are having a gradual increase in the percentage of girls who stay in 4-H club work beyond four years. Of course, this individualized work makes large demands on the extension agent's time. Each such senior girl takes as much time as is given to an adult home demonstrator. However, such encouraging results are being secured, not only with the girl herself but in the spread of influence in the community as a whole, through the demonstration ability of these senior girls, that we feel the time is well spent." These replies are indicative of the results so far obtained - but what of the problems still confronting those persons responsible for work with this group of girls?

Perhaps it may be well first to recognize a few of the complexities that are involved in work with girls of this age group. First, it is difficult to designate specifically the ages of the group under discussion. Insomuch as some girls mature earlier than others there is the question of a mental age grouping as compared with a chronological one. Such a grouping has obvious difficulties. Again, the same work that is suitable for girls 16 to 20 years of age is usually also quite suitable for girls a few years over 20. However, the age eligibility for 4-H club membership as designated several years ago, is from 10 to 20 years, inclusive, Therefore the girls over these age limitations can not be considered 4-H club members. True, in some States they are organized into special clubs; in several States they become local leaders of 4-H club groups while in others they very naturally become associated with the adult, women's groups. My point in bringing these facts to your attention is that there does exist a problem of grouping and of administrative responsibility, although this problem should not by any means be considered serious. In a few States specialists are employed to work with all young people from 20 to 30 years of age. However, with the urgent need for economy in every State, each county home demonstration or club agent in turn must study cooperatively with others how best she can help all these girls.

In reply to the question, What problems do you feel are still unsolved? several State leaders replied that one of the main problems is to provide effective ways be which girls may earn money. In this connection the reply from North Carolina stated, "As girls grow older they realize more and more the advantage of having desirable things in their homes, suitable and attractive clothing, and educational and social opportunities for themselves. They realize also that most farm incomes will not compass these things. Any avenue, therefore, that furnishes an opening for money to add to the income gets their immediate attention. Of paramount importance to them is personal appearance and an attractive home to which they may bring their friends." Also in this connection recent studies reveal the fact that although farm girls remain longer in school than do boys, of those young people leaving school more girls go to the city and at an earlier age than boys. The reasons for this situation are quite plain to any rural worker. The average farm girl goes to the city not because she really wants to leave the home farm, but because she has no practical way of earning money. Is it not time for us as club leaders to give more serious thought to the development of fundamentally sound money-earning activities for farm girls while they are still on the home farm? Dr. C. B. Smith states, "I know of no reason why the girl on the farm should not be a partner with mother or father in the management and profits of the poultry flock, the dairy herd, the orchard, or any other enterprise of the farm. Every human soul cherishes independence. Let us enlarge our club projects for girls as well as for boys. Let's encourage fathers and mothers to take the girls as well as the boys into fuller partnership with them on the farm. Girls will like the country as well as boys when they have opportunity there equal to that of the boys."

Another problem often mentioned in the replies to this question was that agents lack time to call these girls together and meet with them as often as they should because of their present heavy program. Is not the question in this case, What are the compensations of work with these girls for the time and effort expended? In addition, can we not look forward to the time when there will be evolved effective methods of reaching large numbers of these girls?

In regard to the placing of responsibility on these girls, the State girls' club agent of Maryland reported, "We still have an unsolved problem with this group concerning the right amount of responsibility to give them. We are learning through bitter experience that it is not always the best thing to turn over the entire responsibilities for county rallies and banquets or clubs of younger girls to these young people with no or little adult advice. If only we could evolve a plan whereby an adult adviser could be found who would not want to run everything but would teach the young people to think along progressive lines and direct them in the preparation of programs that would be each time better and finer than their last! There is a danger of these young people becoming self-satisfied. In their own successes there is little challenge being given to them of a higher standard, based perhaps upon the experience and study of those more mature."

In the Delaware reply the problem of "having projects grow up with the young people" is discussed. The State club leader reports, "I am quite sure that we, along with a lot of other people, have been offering a limited project diet to a growing project appetite."

In Ohio, because of the feeling that the needs and interests of this group have not yet been adequately met, studies to determine the interests and needs are being made in several counties.

Other problems listed in the replies are the lack of adequate literature; the lack of personnel to take care of the older group and the younger group separately and to do effective follow-up work; the bus schedule in relation to consolidated schools; and the need for adequate organization in a club attended by both age groups of girls so that the interest of both the older and younger girls may be maintained and high-standard work accomplished.

Further Work Contemplated

In relation to further work contemplated, most State agents replied that they planned to continue along their present lines, gradually expanding the programs according to the experiences gained and studies made.

In the Virginia reply to this question was the statement, "We are eager to get each group to have (1) a strong study program on a topic of special interest; (2) an economic project for each member; (3) a social and recreational project; and (4) a community project. We are urging these older girls to develop local talent---by means of dramatics, orchestras, choruses, etc.,---not alone in each case for the thing itself, but also as a means of giving each member an opportunit to fit into something of special importance."

According to the North Carolina plan, "Joint projects for older girls and boys are being contemplated in camp cookery and home making, which include doing one's share of work in the home; spending one's share of income; accepting responsibility for material improvement in the home and its surroundings; postponing personal wants so that the whole family may enjoy joint improvements such as running water, lights, etc.; keeping personal accounts; and providing recreation for the home and community."

Replies from other States ihcluded plans for the study of various home and farm problems such as investment and insurance, financing a farm, getting started in farming, renting versus owning a farm, affording running water or electricity,

getting the most for one's money, and social and family relationships.

Several State reports indicated that county, district, and, in some instances, State organizations of older club members are contemplated which will include both girls and boys.

The Alabama report stated, "that since these girls are in the main those who probably will not have an opportunity to go to college, plans are being made to give them work that will broaden their interests in a cultural way through music and art appreciation and play production. It is the plan also to have these girls act as local leaders for younger groups."

In this relation, it is being increasingly recognized in a number of States that happiness depends largely upon success, vocational success being outstanding. However, due to large families, small farm incomes, inaccessible high schools and colleges, lack of encouragement and inspiration, vocational guidance and education are too often merely glimpsed by hundreds of farm young people. Therefore, it has seemed opportune in several States to include also under work contemplated, more guidance for the older farm girls in helping them to consider intelligently those factors that should play a part in deciding on any career. Surely the discovering of vocational abilities, interests, and social needs is important in the life of every youth. To know how best to guide youth accordingly constitutes a necessary requisite of all leaders who are seeking to help every rural youth to be a community asset, whether he remains on the farm or moves to the city.

According to O. E. Baker, of the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, the fact also should be recognized that because of the ease of transportation by means of the automobile and lately of the airplane, and the ease of communication by means of the telephone, the radio, and motion pictures, human contacts have vastly increased, areas for social life have enlarged, and opportunities for action have multiplied. This situation is having an influence upon the organization of 4-H club work, especially in relation to the group activities of the older girls and boys. Whereas 10 or more years ago, regardless of their ages, all girls and boys had to belong to the one club in the little rural community, to-day the older girls and boys, although few in number in each community, can belong to a sizeable club organized on a district or county basis, depending on the phases of 4-H club work being undertaken. Because such clubs are only beginning to function, it may be well to emphasize under work contemplated, the importance of organizing 4-H club work on a natural-area basis, insomuch as areas for all organized work are increasing in size; and to recognize that different phases of work, as well as different age groups, require areas of different sizes.

As is indicated in the foregoing summary, such a discussion as this can only give glimpses of the basis of an adequate program for rural girls in their later teens or early twenties. However, it seems evident that every leader, in planning or revising any such 4-H club program, should take into consideration the development of a philosophy of rural life that in turn will equip rural girls to make intelligent decisions; the development of a skilled technic in reaching as many of these girls as possible; the utilization of all available facts that may be of concern to rural girls; the development of an adequate, well-trained, understanding leadership to guide them; the means of training rural girls to participate in a more satisfying and constructive way in the family group; capitalization on genuine life experiences of rural girls, which affords unrivaled materials in 4-H

club work for education of the modern type, to help rural girls to develop along their best lines and at their optimum rate; and scrutiny and evaluation of the many activities found in all present programs, to the end that readjustments may be made which will stimulate and maintain the interests of rural girls and render possible the development of a successful, full, and enriched life.